

Fulfilling the Vision: North Rainier Neighborhood Plan Update

Draft Goals and Strategies

Vision: Excerpt from the North Rainier Neighborhood Plan, February 1999

"Entering the North Rainier Valley we are impressed by the neat, well-maintained, well-landscaped main thoroughfares that accommodate all major modes of transportation. We are an interweaving of people of various backgrounds who live and work in a culturally and economically diverse area which maintains its ethnic roots. Business, light industrial, and high-tech job opportunities provide welcome employment for the entire Puget Sound region."

Shaping a Transit Oriented Town Center

This section of the update describes goals of community members to create a strong town center that is attractive to residents as well as visitors.

Residents and business owners alike recognize the potential of light rail to serve as a catalyst to help shape a more pedestrian-oriented town center.

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Goal: Create a destination town center, attractive to visitors and residents for a variety of shopping and recreational experiences.

Discussion

Creating a town center for North Rainier was a central component of the neighborhood plan and station area plan. Community members continue to support this, and offer a more definitive vision about the character of the area, the mix of uses and the connections to the surrounding single family areas. While most of the recommended public improvements have been completed, the envisioned new development and critical elements of streetscape improvements have not. Property owners, particularly of the QFC/Rite Aid site, now see opportunities to create redevelopments that would be defining elements of the town center.

Draft Strategies

- A. Expand the town center area to focus new mixed use development south of S Bayview Street and north of S. Byron Street.
- B. Create neighborhood design guidelines and an urban design framework plan for North Rainier Town Center area.
- C. Consider height options for the QFC / Rite Aid site that allow a broad range of development options.
- D. Continue to pursue redevelopment of the triangle block containing the bus transfer facility. Possible solutions could include undertaking a joint development project incorporating the bus transfer facility, or finding a new location for the bus transfer facility on the west side of Rainier Ave S and redeveloping the block.
- E. Pursue opportunities to create a multicultural shopping area/center/market.

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- F. Consider mixed-use zoning options for the Lowes site, and include the full site and parking area in the Station Area Overlay District.
- G. Work with Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities when considering changes to zoning to evaluate if there are area-specific capacity problems resulting from the potential increase in development capacity.
- H. Create a site-specific urban design framework plan for the Lowes site that could guide a general development plan or rezone. Plan elements could include:
 - building height options;
 - incentive features;
 - break down scale of super blocks to create balance of inwardly and outwardly focused development;
 - open space; and
 - pedestrian connections
- I. Address zoning on west side of Rainier Ave S. immediately south of S. Walden. There are eight single family parcels sandwiched between NC3-65 and L-3. Rezone this area to be consistent with adjacent properties.

Goal: Make the town center a safe and enjoyable space to walk and take transit.

Discussion

It was clearly acknowledged that this is currently an auto-oriented neighborhood. Both Rainier Ave S and MLK Jr. Way S are dominated by vehicular traffic and are difficult to navigate as a pedestrian or bicyclist. Many people are afraid for their personal safety while waiting on the street for a bus. Nearby residents who could actually walk to the stores said they didn't because it was unsafe and it's difficult to walk from store to store. In the future, this area is envisioned as a destination shopping area where it is possible to run multiple errands in one trip during the day or evening. Currently, the area does not feel secure because there are no "eyes on the street" from local businesses and residences.

Draft Strategies

- A. Create a pedestrian network of pathways throughout the town center, connecting retail, services and light rail station. Specific actions could include:
 - Implementation of the Southeast Transportation Study (SETS) project #10 and #11 to calm traffic and improve the streetscape along S McClellan St from 23rd Ave S to Mt. Baker Blvd. The projects include: relocating utility poles and signal controller cabinets where necessary to ensure a clear walking path; adding a missing sidewalk link; widening sidewalks; installing planting strips; installing curb extensions; and adding pedestrian lighting. Additional work may include working with Metro to relocate trolley wire poles out of the pedestrian pathway.
 - Work with property owners and developers to break up the large block and/or parcels into smaller pieces, providing walking routes through the sites and connections to the surrounding street grid, as well as consolidating the number

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- of driveways as redevelopment occurs to provide an improved pedestrian environment.
- Complete the sidewalk network to make better connections between destinations.
- Enhance access throughout the town center for people of all ages and abilities; paying particular attention to connections to transit and shopping areas from the Lighthouse for the Blind and the Center Park.
- Identify sites that would benefit from unique art or pavement treatments to support a vibrant walking environment.
- B. Modify the Land Use Code to define minimum widths for sidewalks and landscaped planting strips on all streets in station areas with pedestrian designations
- C. Improve street ends to create more connections between neighborhoods.
- D. Create a more secure environment for people and business using the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to enliven temporarily vacant sites.

Goal: Explore methods to transform Rainier Avenue S between S Bayview Street and MLK Jr. Way S to a pedestrian oriented main street.

Discussion

Almost everyone agreed that Rainier Ave and the abutting development in its current form are not conducive to creating a vibrant Town Center. By reducing traffic on Rainier Ave S, the streetscape would be made more appealing for pedestrians and still be able to adequately accommodate transit. A "traffic-calmed" Rainier Ave S would most likely promote further streetscape improvements.

Draft Strategies

- A. Evaluate an "MLK re-route" that would route thru-traffic from Rainier Ave S to MLK Jr. Way S from the Rainier Ave S/MLK Jr. Way S intersection.
 - This strategy calls for the rerouting of thru-traffic from Rainier Ave S to MLK Jr. Way S. at the Rainier Ave S and MLK Jr. Way S intersection and back to Rainier Ave S by way of S Bayview St. (Note: The re-route strategy would require more detailed modeling and operational analysis to understand the traffic volumes that would be diverted, effects upon congestion especially at intersections, geometric requirements, and the need to acquire additional rights-of-way (ROW). Both existing and future conditions would need to be studied before any decision were made about this alternative. Currently, there is no funding for such an analysis, and engineering, design, or construction.)
- B. Develop street design cross-sections for Rainier Ave. S that support a more pedestrian-oriented shopping area.
 - SDOT will complete a conceptual design for Rainier Ave S from the Rainier Ave S and MLK Jr. Way intersection to S Bayview St which shows a possible new cross-section that includes landscaped median where possible, and other features such as a parking lane. This design would require additional ROW from private landowners. (Note: Before any design alterations could be

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accomplished, SDOT would have to conduct an operational analysis of any proposed changes. This analysis would include impacts upon levels of congestion, especially at intersections, and transit speed and reliability. Both existing and future conditions may need to be studied. Currently, there is no funding for such an analysis, and for engineering, design, or construction.)

Goal: Make Rainier Ave S. and MLK Jr. Way S corridors function as “complete streets.”

Discussion

At every meeting people spoke of transportation challenges in the area, with better bus, walking and biking environments a high priority for all. Around the discussion tables one person would comment on the need for sidewalks wide enough to walk and have outdoor cafes and adequate bus shelters. Another would add that there needs to be on-street parking in the commercial areas to act as a buffer between traffic and pedestrian. A third person would comment that we should not forget bike lanes. Everyone acknowledged the difficulties of fitting it all within the available rights-of-ways.

Draft Strategies

- A. Implement Southeast Transportation Study (SETS) which serves as the blueprint for programming transportation improvements in SE Seattle.
- B. Use the Pedestrian Master Plan as a tool for prioritizing pedestrian improvements and Neighborhood Street Fund projects.
- C. Use the Bicycle Master Plan as a tool for prioritizing bicycle improvements.
- D. Look for opportunities to develop transportation corridors that might encompass several roads. For example, consider if Chief Sealth trail can function as the major north/ south bike route, enhancing the connections from it to commercial areas.

Creating Choices for Living, Working and Playing

This section of the update describes goals of community members to preserve, enhance and in some cases improve the day to day life of residents and merchants in the community. It also outlines strategies and actions to help achieve these goals.

Goal: Foster a vibrant, business district that serves North Rainier residents and is a destination shopping area with stores that serve the greater Valley.

Discussion

Community members want a shopping district: a place they can go for their daily to monthly needs. A number stressed that they would like a place to buy clothes and shoes without going to Southcenter. Others spoke of the desire to have a place where they would spend an afternoon meeting friends, eating and shopping.

Draft Strategies

- A. Strengthen the Rainier Valley Chamber of Commerce and encourage increased membership from local businesses so that business owners can work together and

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- with the community to create a vibrant neighborhood business district that serves the community. The Chamber can also provide a venue for peer support and mentoring as well as a venue for its members to raise its concerns to the City and to pursue grants and technical assistance.
- B. Support and expand the existing diverse mix of generally small scale businesses by:
 - Providing technical assistance to small businesses in retail corridor.
 - Providing access to financing for small businesses in retail corridor.
 - Encouraging membership in local business associations.
 - Encouraging peer support and mentoring.
 - C. Support partnerships to strengthen the business district, such as:
 - SCORE/Small Business Development Center/Community Capital Development
 - Community Capital Development
 - University of Washington Entrepreneurial Law Clinic
 - Rainier Valley Community Development Fund
 - HomeSight
 - D. Retain a grocery and pharmacy store in the town center.
 - E. Improve the existing town center and make it more inviting using the City's Neighborhood Business District Fund and Neighborhood Street Funds. Work with the community to identify projects and initiatives in which the community's effort would be matched by funds from the Neighborhood Matching Fund.
Improvements may include:
 - Streetscape amenities, such as benches and banners;
 - Activating public spaces with street vendors; and
 - Business district marketing map and brochure.

Goal: Support the continued ethnic and cultural diversity represented in the businesses and community.

Discussion

The cultural diversity of the commercial district is valued and supported by the community. The broader community would like these often small, independently owned, culturally focused businesses to remain as the North Rainier Urban Village grows and transforms. Small, ethnic business owners spoke of the need to both expand their market and to support continued affordability.

Draft Strategies

- A. Explore new and existing models of financing mixed-use development projects that provide affordable commercial space as well as affordable housing in City-funded mixed use projects.
- B. Promote the location of cultural community centers and services in the neighborhood.
- C. Promote peer support, mentoring and technical assistance for businesses interested in broadening their market, and other means of improving their business capacity.

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- D. Promote opportunities for cross-cultural integration among the business owners as well as among the broader community. Seek opportunities to create a vibrant, stable multi-cultural shopping area.
- E. Explore feasibility of using the Station Area Overlay or incentive zoning to create affordable commercial space.
- F. Implement programming and improvements that are culturally relevant to people with disabilities throughout the town center, such as innovative aesthetic enhancements to the public realm, parks that incorporate audible, visual and tactile configurations.

Goal: Within the town center prioritize the development of a range of more dense mixed income housing units.

Discussion

Many community members noted that there is little housing in the center of the North Rainier Urban Village and suggested improving pedestrian and transit connections into the center, as well as increasing the vitality and personal safety of the center by increasing the number of housing units there. More market rate housing is needed, and some of it needs to be affordable. Concerns were expressed that increased development will increase rents and force residents to move away. Affordable housing and affordable senior housing is important.

Draft Strategies

- A. Consider including into the urban village and rezoning a portion of single family area to the west of the QFC to a multi-zone that would allow more dense residential development.
- B. Encourage and require mix of home prices and sizes through active use of incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs.
- C. Leverage public funds to support affordable housing adjacent to light rail station.
- D. Encourage affordable family sized homes through incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs.
- E. Use City funding to leverage other funding to preserve existing and create new subsidized housing.
- F. Apply Comprehensive Plan affordable housing targets to the North Rainier Urban Village and periodically evaluate progress; set affordable housing objectives and use incentive, direct City funding, and surplus property programs to fill gaps.
- G. Achieve a balance of affordable rental and homeownership housing through incentive, direct funding, and surplus property programs.
- H. Within mixed use zones in the Station Area Overlay District, consider minimum residential densities (related to the zoning designations) which must be built in new buildings in order to create the critical mass of people and activity for a Town Center, and appropriate amounts of parking in transit-oriented development.

Goal: Promote the North Rainier Urban Village as a “Green Hub” providing green jobs and training, and green development.

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Discussion

Community members felt that the presence of the University of Washington as a land owner and the tradition of North Rainier Urban Village as a commercial and light manufacturing area suggested an opportunity to build a green technology incubator.

Draft Strategies

- A. Consider creating a green technology focused extension program by work with organizations such as the University of Washington.
- B. Build on the ring of green provided by Cheasty Greenspace and Mt. Baker Boulevard by stressing the use of complementary green building technologies in development regulations and incentives.

Goal: Support the neighborhood's youth.

Discussion

The North Rainier Urban Village is home to Franklin High School – a center for both youth education and youth activities. The community would like to see more programs to positively engage its young people.

Draft Strategies

Continue to fund programs that engage youth in positive and safe ways:

- Youth in Focus who will offer six free photography classes for 40-50 underserved youth ages 13-19, taught by professional teaching artists.
- Seattle Chamber Players who will offer a ten-session composition workshop to students at Franklin High School.
- Northwest African American Museum to offer an 84-hour summer session for 15 underserved teens from Garfield, Franklin & Rainier Beach High School to create a public sculpture of Jimi Hendrix at the Jimi Hendrix Park using recycled materials.

Goal: Improve and activate the “ring of green” surrounding the urban village by providing strong connections to the greenbelts, boulevards and parks and augmenting them with a hierarchy of open spaces.

Discussion

The community values the existing parks and open spaces; many expressed that it was a key reason why they enjoy living in the area. They also saw that there would be a need for a variety of parks or open spaces in the town center as it gained residents and to support it as a shopping destination.

Draft Strategies

- A. Improve and augment the Cheasty and Mt Baker Boulevard network by:
 - improving street end stair;

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- constructing new trails from Beacon Hill to the town center that offer easier grades than those on streets such as S. McClellan St.; and
- enhancing the streetscape on S. McClellan Street.
- B. Consider non-profit organizations or private developer in the establishment of a multi-cultural community facility.
- C. Implement park programming and improvements that are culturally relevant to the neighborhood.
- D. Pursue the potential for acquiring new parks space within the urban village through the Parks and Green Spaces Levy funds for Neighborhood Park Acquisition.
- E. Implement the Parks and Green Spaces Levy project to renovate and improve Atlantic Street Playground.
- F. Implement the Parks and Green Spaces Levy project to renovate and improve Rainier Park Playground.
- G. Use opportunities, such as the 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy project at Children's Play Garden and other Park's programs to increase accessibility and to create open spaces that are relevant to people with disabilities.
- H. Continue to implement the Pro Parks Levy designs for Jimi Hendrix Park, including elements that improve connections to the Northwest African American Museum and the surrounding neighborhood.
- I. As funding becomes available create additional children's structured and unstructured play areas.
- J. Increase the vibrancy and safety of the public realm with wider sidewalks, landscaping and pedestrian lighting.
- K. Promote the development of more P-Patches and other methods to increase access to locally based food sources and to build community.

Goal: Improve Public Safety

Discussion

Throughout Southeast Seattle the Community's concerns about public safety negatively affects their use transit and parks, and walking or bicycling to local shopping areas.

Draft Strategies

- A. Create neighborhood design guidelines that emphasize pedestrian-friendly elements in new developments and ensure "eyes on the street".
- B. Define and protect emergency access routes to and through the town center for reliable access by police and fire vehicles.
- C. Increase the mix of uses and residential density in the town center to increase the numbers of people using the public spaces including the sidewalks.
- D. Build positive working relationship between the community and Seattle Police Department.
- E. Prioritize pedestrian lighting within the town center.